BOTHERED ALL THE TIME

(All recorded by William Ferris)

Side One (15 minutes, 51 seconds)
1) Lovey Williams, Going Away Blues
   (12/63, Rising Star, MS)
2) Sonny Boy Williams, "How I Learned to Play Guitar"
   (6/68, Leland, MS)
3) Louis Dotson, Sittin' on Top of the World
   (6/68, Lorman, MS)
4) Arthur Lee Williams, "A Definition of the Blues"
   (7/68, Birdie, MS)
5) Parchman Work Gang, Rosie
   (7/68, Camp B. Lambert, MS)
6) James "Son" Thomas, Bull Cow Blues
   (7/68, Leland, MS)
7) Lee Kizart, "Juke Joint Reminiscence"
   (7/68, Tutwiler, MS)
8) Lee Kizart, Boogie
   (7/68, Tutwiler, MS)
9) Lee Kizart, "A Tale of Church Hypocrisy"
   (7/68, Tutwiler, MS)
10) James "Son" Thomas, "Blues and Spirituals"
    (7/68, Leland, MS)
11) Southland Hummingbirds, There Are Days
    (6/68, Lula, MS)

Side Two (19 minutes, 36 seconds)
1) Jasper Love, "The Blues as Consolation"
   (8/68, Clarksdale, MS)
2) Lee Kizart, World in a Jug (7/68, Tutwiler, MS)
3) Gussie Tobe, The Abuse of Farm Laborers (7/68, Leland, MS)
4) Sonny Boy Williams, Shotgun Blues (7/68, Leland, MS)
5) Gussie Tobe, "Why They Called Colored Folks Bears" (7/68, Leland, MS)
6) Sonny Boy Williams, Going Down to the Station (7/68, Leland, MS)
7) Anonymous, Hidden Violence in Mississippi (8/68, Clarksdale, MS)
8) Lovey Williams, Mojo Hand Blues
    (12/68, Rising Star, MS)
9) Jasper Love, "Tables Turned on the Bossman" (8/68, Clarksdale, MS)
10) Wash Herron & Big Jack Jackson, Stack of Dollars (7/68, Clarksdale, MS)

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Films on folk culture are available from the Center for Southern Folklore, P.O. Box 40105, Memphis, Tennessee 38104

"Bothered All the Time" tracks the blues up and down Highway 61, carrying the listener from the sound of the lone one-stand and prison ward chants to blues and gospel. Musicians sing the blues, then explain that the music is "downheartedness, that's all it is. Hardship." Their voices speak of a people and their music, of learning to play blues on a brompt wire stretched alongside a home: "Put a kind of large rock at the bottom and a small one at the top. Take me a bottle or something as a slide, you know, to note it with, to make it fret," of dealing with the boss man: "I remember the time way back there I was plowing for 50¢ a day. What could you buy with it? You had to spend it right down there at that robin at the ancient, a robbinsy!" and of lost love: "Blues actually is 'round you every day. That's just a feeling from within a person, hardship between you and your wife or maybe you and your girlfriend."

In the face of hardship they sing and speak of celebration, endurance and survival in small homes, churches, and "juke joints" where music is a constant and familiar sound. While a bluesman like Lee Kizart is not a churchgoer, there is a link between his "I feel mistreated, little girl, and don't care where I go, and the gospel line of the Southland Hummingbirds:' There are days I like to be alone.' Both sing of loneliness and evoke memories of slavery, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow South. A common history binds both the singers and their audience as the black man sings for his own color.

Born in towns such as Lula, Alligator, Panther Burn, Anguilla, and Onward, from which mile-long rows of cotton and soybeans extend, these musicians speak and sing of life for the southern black sharecropper. As many of their fellow musicians moved north and shaped an urban sound built on these blues, music and tales moved back and forth. Tales of a St. Louis woman shot in a Delta juke joint: "Her hand fell to her side, close to the end of the porch and my car sitting right between the porches. Broke her neck. It was a .45 bullet alright enough," of a big-time Chicago preacher with a restaurant and saloon in the basement of his church: "They got a saloon down there, but upstairs they in church. No doubt that's some big reverend's place of business. He go down and shoot himself good with some alcohol, then he go back up and serve', of whites calling "colored folks bears": "Why did they call colored folks bears? You know why? Because his flesh wasn't colored as you he call you a bear" — all shape this portrait of a people and their music.

Recorded in the 60s, these musicians are a counterpart to the rapidly changing blues scene today. They offer a key to the meaning of blues and why it is so central to the black man. It cements a family bond, and these voices are a lasting testament to that family. With each listening we return to the blues and recall a verse sung by James Thomas each Saturday night when Shelby "Papa Jazz" Brown closed his Leland night club, The Rum Boogie:

Goodbye, everybody,
You know we got to go.
Goodbye, everybody,
People, you know we got to go.
But if you come back to Mr. Shelby's place,
You will see the same old show.

William Ferris
University of Mississippi
Bothered All the Time

From The New York Times

Despite the immense influence of blues on white rock music, the blues has largely remained beneath the surface in terms of pop culture and experience of most white. A music played by blacks for blacks as the sentenced human condition moved from cotton fields to the blues club. Until recently the blues was either ignored by whites, despised for being black music, or given the respectability that it deserves. In the fact that most blues is now written and performed by the possible few blues by blacks. Perhaps some songwriters are black, and the occasional "great white blues" by singers like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.

This recent attempt to help widen the blues market has been done in two ways: the blues as a folk music and its documentation and some collected blues as folk music and its documentation and some collected blues as collected blues. It is obvious that the blues is in danger of becoming a popular in the United States. I know of only one other blues - "Blues in the Moonlight" - recorded by Alan Lomax in 1948. The 1960s is a period without much to say about the blues, as well as music, at least in the sense that the singles and albums have already turned the South for decades to the different blues world of the northern rathe.

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A typical downtown blues consists of a nucleus of musicians which by association form the core of a blues in a singer's mind. But he will sometimes add a new rhythm or add some freestanding solos (not necessarily the same ones each time)—especially if he finds himself before a receptive audience. So a blues will often vary in length and content, depending on the conditions under which the singer is performing as to how it is to the same song. A singer with this attitude toward his material may well use a recorded blues and will adapt it to his own style and repertoire, as an example, as done by Lovie Williams. When this happens, it is rarely merely one other version of a song which a singer takes over and sees for his own ends. It is not like a pop song, which we expect to hear performed word for word each time.

A downtown blues can be, not typically, narrower in structure, but consists of a group of fragments each of which is normally distinct in itself, conveying a completed thought or emotion or experience. The stanza may cover a range of totally unrelated themes but more often they will suggest a particular mood or feeling which gives the blues its coherence. It is precisely this rather loose structure of the downtown blues which enables a singer to incorporate even a well-known recorded blues into his own repertoire and feel that he has himself "composed" it, as indeed in a sense he has, since he needlessly to be aware of it if might well have reified the position of the stanzas and added stanzas of his own. So Lovie Williams claims to have made up most of his songs, when even it one now to a well-known blues like "East St. Louis" while Sonny Boy Williams observed, "Well, it makes me up on my own, I make up the music and the words. Sure do."

The singer is helped in the process of making up his own blues or rewriting someone else's by the fact that the downtown blues tends to be highly formulaic. Anyone who has heard a large number of blues cannot avoid being struck by the fact that many individual stanzas recur in a wide variety of contexts. Such stanzas are formulaic: that is, they consist of a number of lines which, while comprising a basic blues rhythm or pattern, express an important feeling or experience or thought. Most singers, especially in the earlier period, would have a larger repertoire of such blues and stanzas which enabled them to compose their blues in a larger context, so it probably will need to be expressed repeatedly to make the same effect. A formula is simply a means to an end, and the song composer will come up with a formula which may pass into the blues of a particular area and time with the large of its structure. But what is perhaps more important is that a real creative singer can, through the use of formulae stanzas, express with great fidelity and depth the range of his own experience or thought. In a simple song, especially in a time like this when a character creates his blues, and in doing so feels that he is expressing his feelings in his song.

The highly formulaic nature of most downtown blues probably serves another function. The blues is played in many contexts. Some singers such as Sonny Boy Williams only play in a context which makes them feel comfortable; "I just sit around the house and make up my ideas. I don't try to sing them out nowhere," and others like Mississippi John Hurt and Bukka White are available for small informal gatherings. But although the blues is as a level personal music, one which the singer or the listener may directly feel and experience, it is also very much a social music, and many singers like James "Son" Thomas and Lee Konitz play at a wide range of functions from among non-professional basis. In the crowded, noisy atmosphere of a little joint (one of the early and most important styles of breaking down of the blues which is formulaic, as well as well known to the audience as to the singer, will be more likely to communicate immediately over the talk and the glass of a little joint), the formula in the social music is functioning, expression precisely in but also general form an experience or feeling common to the community as a whole, the blues will reflect the audience's lives. It is not a social music, and a personal music at one and the same time, and the singer often show their awareness of this by telling the audience about between stanzas. Apposite in this context, People, when do you think I think of that? or, People, you telling me your true facts, aloud in the blues, just as it is usual for the audience to talk back to the singer to respond to him after he has just finished. This fluidity, this openness is part of the music on the record, and no examples are offered here for technical reason; but listeners should bear it in mind when listening to the blues of men like Thomas and Konitz.

Lee Konitz is typical of an older generation of singers who made a living from the blues in the twenties. The blues style and jazz, and blues in Gledhers, Talbotboro County, in 1902 when he once played his piano in the steak and-I have heard of one street that has been moved to Annapolis in Newbury County but when James Brown recorded him in 1946 he was back in the Delta in Tawas County. Konitz claimed that he was born in 1927 and had written his first blues tune. "I learned everything I know myself;" through his style shows signs of influence from religious music, and it may well be that it was to the composition of the local church that he became interested in playing the blues for the first time as a young boy. In 1945 he recorded himself on one of the earliest and then fairly educed, a common homemade instrument composed of a give, and one that many saved by stringing them together, of different strengths and different sounds to create a店铺反复的 music. Konitz has, however, developed his one integrated style of playing which is a highly distinctive.

On site 1, hand 2, William Williams describes how he made a one-string guitar. First a brown piece of pig's hair was laid on top, and then a second piece of pig's hair was added, and then a third string seems to have been strung on. He has, however, developed his own integrated style of playing which is a highly distinctive.

One common feature of the blues is the presence of the guitar in the blues. In many cases, the guitar is the only instrument present in the blues. This is because the guitar is the instrument of choice for many musicians, especially in the rural areas of the South. However, in some cases, other instruments may be included, such as the harmonica or the banjo. The guitar's ability to accompany the singer's voice makes it a popular choice for blues musicians.
In the 1970s it was sometimes fashionable to look for "protest" in the blues protest against racism and all its social and economic implications in songs that consciously or unconsciously echoed opposition to theCAR, just as the songs of the white middle-class college students did at the time. Songs of this kind do exist in the blues tradition; one can think of the Texas song "East Mean Farm's," which exposes the abuse of black farm laborers in East Texas, and "The Bluesman Blues" about racial discrimination in Washington, D.C., but such songs are comparatively rare. The reason for this is complex, but a major one is the fact that the blues is a folk music, and as such celebrates life as it is, not as it ought to be. "Protest" proves that things can be changed, and that protest songs can help implement such change. One has to remember that the downhome blues is the music of scattered rural communities and town and city photo, communities which until very recently were so dominated by white power that any overt protest against the system was fraught with danger. The aura of violence which surrounded the reminiscences of men like Cussie Taylor, Jackson Love, and the anonymous informants on side 2, band 4, explains very well why open protest in the blues is the exception. A white man who was willing to honest a black as the 20th and 30th with being a "bit" because of his skin color, would be just as willing to hunt up or even kill a black who offered any protest in song or in any other form. White students at liberal arts colleges were only able to "protest" as openly against the Vietnam War because the system either was, or seemed to, limit its power against the singer. And the time when this broke down, sometimes, as at Kent State. The South, where arbitrary power in the hands of a white racist superman was still very recently used if it will to keep blacks in their place, the singer would be wary of singing openly songs at protest: "cause you know you'll get killed" (side 2, band 4).

But I suggested at the outset that the blues is a kind of secret music, a music played by blacks for blacks, and from which whites have been, with few exceptions, excluded because of their middle-class, hypocritical, or ignorant nature. There are few "protest" songs in the blues tradition; but in song after song there is an undertone of protest against the white social order which is easy to overlook. A major blues theme (one present in all the blues songs on this album) is love and sex; in fact, the blues represents one of the great bodies of folk poetry on love in the Western tradition. But although a song may have a love relationship as its overt theme, the surface in countless images and recurrent motifs details a large context—there is evidence of protest against "the man," against "Winter Charlie." The significance of these details may well be lost on the outsider; but the bluesman knows his audience and knows that they will understand and respond.

Sonny Boy Williams's "Going Down to the Station" provides an example. To the outsider, the casual listener Williams' blues would probably appear to be on the classic blues theme of love. But the blues, we remember, is not usually narrative; typically such stories are discursive; and how we have our stoops about leaving town, doing a train away from an unspecialized situation, another about going on a drunk to get relief from an unspecialized blues. But in a third in which the singer shows that he is going to search of his lover Jackson Love (side 2, band 1) gives the example of a man "that's as mean as a little rat," who says the blues to get relief from the way his white boss is treating him. Leave himself calls the blues is "for a bond of worry," and Arthur Lee Williams (side 1, band 3) defines blues as "just downheartedness," which many be about a girl; as he points out—but which is also "round you every day." Twice he defines blues as "hand-dog," and a "hard time," without any such specific reference. In the blues by Sonny Boy Williams (no relation to Arthur Lee) the intense feeling generated by the performance as a whole and the song and relief and love as much about "the totality of the singer's life, the daily experience of poverty and racial brutality, of economic and social injustice, as they are about love."

Images of drowning yourself out of the blues, of moving on the next train or city or state, are also in the blues tradition. Song after song celebrates the names of the great trains and railroad lines and of such a highway (6) that thread the continent, moving (most of them) south to north out of Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. The way to get drunk, to move on, may possibly be seen as ways of avoiding a situation of not facing up to it. But as a society where overt or "hidden" violence (side 2, band 4) dominated black-white relations into the 1970s, moving on—trying to find something better—is a form of protest against the system, just as in a less and more desperate way, getting drunk is. But are assertions of individuality, of a refusal to accept, and both are celebrated in the blues. But the blues are also more than that, for not only do they reflect life as it is for rural and working class blacks (as opposed to the romantic distortions of life offered up by most white popular music), but they transform or restructure FE in life which is a part of the protest, and which is one of the blues most enduring themes. Wash Henson and Big Jack Johnson express what I mean in these rhythmically exciting and spirited version of "Rounds of Dollar" which ends this album.

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NOTES
W.C. Handy. Father of the Blues (Columbia Books: New York, 1970), p. 78. Handy is almost certainly wrong in sug- gesting that the bohemian style of blues guitarists originated in the technique of Hawaiian guitarists which is different in many respects.

Wendy. Father of the Blues, p. 86. On these singers and these recordings, see John Faber, Charles Patton (Studio Vista: London, 1970) and David Evans. Tommy Johnson (Studio Vista, 1971). The recorded blues of these men are readily available on LP records. See discography.

I owe this information to David Evans.

Downhome blues singers—singers from the rural and urban South—rarely give titles to their blues. All the titles on this album, with the exception of the well-known working "Ragtime" have been supplied by me.


See Ferris, Blacks from the Delta, p. 201. Of the singers on this record, James "Son" Thomas is the one who has been most in- fluenced by recorded blues; a large proportion of his repertoire consists of barely those copies of well-known commercially recorded blues. "To be confused with neither of the more famous "Sonny Boy" Williams, John Lee Williamson and Atlee "Rice" Miller. When recorded by Ferris in 1968, Williams was living in Leland, Washington County.

The process has been observed by Ferris.

Blues from the Delta, p. 458. Important work is being done in this field by David Evans and his findings are now available in his book, Big Road Blues (University of California Press, 1982). I would like to thank David Evans for sending me copies of his academic articles on this subject, to which I am indebted in this essay.

A classic version recorded by the Memphis Minstrels, Frank Stokes and Dave Sunny in 1927; available on Frank Stokes, Can't Believe of the Memphis Blues. Yazoo L-1019.

See Ferris, Blues from the Delta, p. 991.

A good version of "Tom Moore's Farm" by Mincie Lipschitz is available on Texas Blues: The Early 50s, Blues Classics 18; "The Bourgeois Blues" is reissued on Locutab: The Library of Congress Recordings, Liruka 4001/2.